

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is a mindfulness-based behaviour therapy that promotes **acceptance of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings** and **commitment to values-based action**. The goal of ACT is not symptom-reduction, but to create a rich and meaningful life while accepting the inevitable pain of life.

principles of acceptance and commitment therapy

Psychological
suffering is a
normal human
experience

To accept and let
uncomfortable
thoughts, feelings
and sensations
come and go
without struggling
with them

Psychological
suffering
increases when
we try to *get rid*
of symptoms

“In ACT, **there is no attempt to try to reduce, change, avoid, suppress,** or control [unwanted emotions or internal experiences]. Instead, clients learn to reduce the impact...of unwanted thoughts and feelings [by] learning to **stop fighting with their private experiences**; to open up to them, make room for them, and **allow them to come and go** without a struggle” (Harris, 2006).



VALUES
ACCEPTANCE

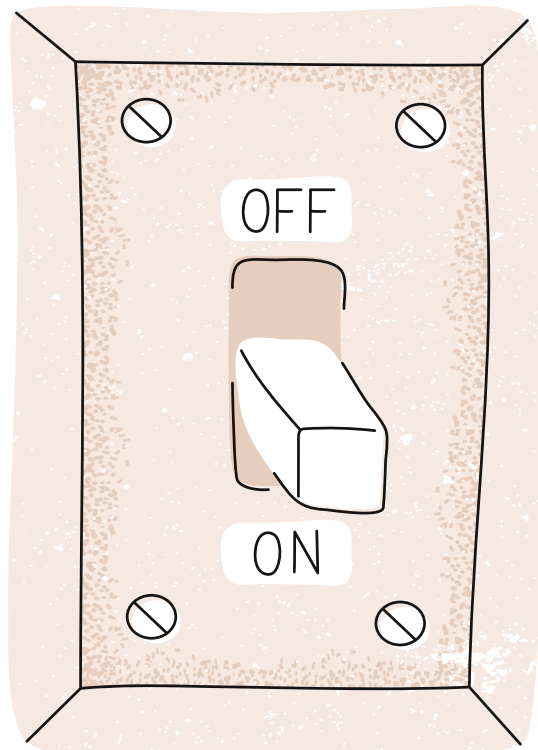
MINDFULNESS
DIFFUSION

The Struggle Switch

Imagine that there is a switch in your mind called the “Struggle Switch.” Every time an uncomfortable thought, feeling, or sensation arises, you flip that Struggle Switch ON.

With the Struggle Switch on, you struggle with everything that comes your way; **you try to get rid of uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and sensations**, try to distract yourself from them, or even let them completely control you. You might think something like, “Oh no! Here’s anxiety! How do I get rid of it?”

Furthermore, because you are struggling with emotions and/or thoughts, they get worse. Your emotions are **amplified** when the Struggle Switch is on.



Even though every instinct tells you to struggle, the solution is to **turn the Struggle Switch OFF**.

With the switch off, uncomfortable emotions come up, and it’s not that you like them or are okay with them, but you simply **let them pass in their own time**. It’s like you say, “Hey, anxiety. I guess you’re here. Do your thing, then.”

Acceptance

WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE?

Acceptance is **making room** for unwanted thoughts, feelings, sensations, and urges instead of trying to stop them or letting them completely control you.

Oftentimes, when an unpleasant emotion or sensation shows up, such as anxiety, stress, or sadness, we try to ignore it, push it away, distract ourselves, or let it completely control our actions. However, **the more we resist, the more it persists**. Struggling with our thoughts and feelings often makes them worse.

If you successfully practice acceptance, you will be able to allow unpleasant thoughts, emotions, and sensations to **come and go without struggling** with them.

ways to practice acceptance

1. **Notice and name** what is showing up inside of you.
2. **Allow it to freely flow** through you.
3. **Expand awareness** to the world around you.

Take a breath and make room for your thoughts and emotions. As you breathe in, imagine welcoming your emotions in. As you breathe out, imagine some of that emotion diffusing out of you. (It's okay if that emotion sticks around for a while.)

Imagine that there is a door in your mind. Behind that closed door are some thoughts and feelings that you are trying to push away. Imagine opening the door, and letting the thoughts and feelings come in.



Cognitive Diffusion

WHAT IS COGNITIVE DIFFUSION?

Cognitive diffusion is a technique to handle unhelpful thoughts. The technique involves paying attention to the **process** of thinking rather than the **content** of our thoughts. It's taking a mental step back and looking at our thoughts rather than looking at the world from our thoughts.

ways to practice cognitive diffusion

Think of your thoughts as noise coming from a radio. Imagine placing the radio beside you.

Imagine your thoughts as bubbles or balloons floating near your head, a group of fish or birds swimming/flying by, or a train looping a track.

"I'm having the thought that..."

"There's the _____ story."

"Our thoughts seem to be the literal truth, or rules that must be obeyed, or important events that require our full attention, or threatening events that we must get rid of. In other words, **when we fuse with our thoughts, they have enormous influence** over our behaviour" (Harris, 2006).



Emotion Surfing

Emotion surfing is a technique to manage and “ride out” uncomfortable thoughts, feelings and sensations

Have you ever sat on the beach and watched the waves, noticing them coming and going? A wave starts off small and builds gently, gradually gathering speed and growing bigger. It continues to grow until it reaches a peak. Once the wave has crested, it gradually subsides. The same happens with emotions in your body. They start off small and then steadily increase in size.

All too often we get into a struggle with our emotions. In emotion surfing, though, we don't try to resist our emotions — we just give them space. If you give an ocean wave enough space, it will reach a crest and then harmlessly subside.

1. Acknowledge what you're feeling.
2. Take a breath and make room for it.
3. Ride out the wave. Watch as the wave rises, crests and then falls.

Reminders

- No thought, feeling or sensation will last forever.
- It's okay to experience multiple waves of emotion. You may experience wave after wave! That's okay.
- The more you resist, the more it persists.

Inhale

Exhale

Inhale

Exhale

